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ADDRESS
to the
Teachers of New York City

by
DR. WILLIAM L. ETTINGER
Superintendent of Schools



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September 20, 1918

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I would therefore urge that the people continue to give generous support to their schools of all grades, and that the schools adjust themselves as wisely as possible to the new conditions, to the end that no boy or girl shall have less opportunity for education because of the war, and that the Nation may be strengthened as it can only be through the right education of all its people.

Woodrow Wilson

The Teacher and the Development of National Ideals

BY WILLIAM L. ETTINGER, Superintendent of Schools

Fellow Teachers:

As we begin the arduous work of the new school year, I deem it my duty and also my privilege to direct your attention to educational problems which require, for satisfactory solution, your broadest vision, your keenest intelligence, and your resolute application.

The present titanic war has made our Anglo-Saxon civilization conscious of its ideals as contrasted with a Teutonic swash buckler "Kultur" which threatened to impose upon us and our Allies a sordid militarism. Democracy, instead of being a shibboleth of politicians, has become the creed of millions of people of different nationalities, in defense of which

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nations rather than armies are waging a war unto death. Shocking indeed it is to realize that the paternalistic government and the resulting superficial prosperity of the German people, which aroused the favorable commendation of many sincere students, were but a sinister exploitation of the nation in the interests of a greedy, ambitious autocracy. We spontaneously find a new significance in Napoleon's dictum that three-fourths of a fact lies in its spiritual value.

This world war is a conflict of opposing ideals, of which the glistening bayonets and the rattling machine guns are but the material expression. During its progress, let us hold to the splendid thought of a little French peasant girl who, describing the French and German armies facing each other across the Marne, wrote that although they were so close that a swallow with one sweep could wing his way across

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the shallow stream, yet in terms of truth, in terms of decency, in terms of honesty, in terms of right and wrong, the two armies were as remote from each other as are the polar stars.

As partial compensation for the dreadful carnage and the appalling devastation that the war has wrought, there has been a spiritual awakening in which the scales of ignorance, bigotry and mammon worship have dropped from our eyes, leaving us with a clearer insight into the fundamentals of individual and of national life.

As our schools are the nation's most potent instrument in the development of national ideals, it would be strange indeed if this world crisis did not compel changes in our conceptions as to the value and the function of education as a phase of our institutional life. We are called upon to scrutinize anew our work in terms of our underlying theories, our methods

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of instruction, and our discipline, in order that through reflection we may acquire that freshness of vision, that truthfulness of aim, and that steadfastness of purpose necessary to insure the salvation of our democracy through the proper training of our future citizens.

What is the truth concerning the value of the work in which we are engaged? Our results are apparently intangible, difficult of measurement, and often at seeming variance with the immediate demands of commerce and industry. But if the achievements of ourselves and our Allies have demonstrated one fact above all others, it is that the moral fibre, the morale of the nation, is more vitally significant than any degree of material prosperity, and, moreover, that its quality is the fruitage of a proper educational system. Not the last line, but rather the first line of defense, is the public school

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system of our land, and it is no exaggeration to say that the battles of to-morrow are being won in the schools of to-day.

Should not a consideration of such facts lend an increased dignity, a deeper seriousness, an enhanced value to our work as teachers? Should not cynicism, negligence, unskillfulness give way to the same degree of optimism, resourcefulness, and prowess that we expect of Pershing and his staff when they lead our men to battle? We who are soldiers behind the far flung battle-line, and into whose hands is entrusted the training of our country's most precious heritage, must so saturate ourselves with the needs of the vital present and the demands of a promising and urgent future that our professional attitude, our methods of instruction, and our means of discipline will be a reflex of our matured point of view.

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It is imperative that *every teacher within our system*:

(1) Shall be aggressively patriotic in word and deed in upholding the standards set by President Wilson, and in furthering all war measures which our nation sees fit to enforce.

(2) Shall interpret history so as to reveal the enduring Anglo-Saxon principles of personal liberty, to which our President has given such eloquent expression.

(3) Shall, through the ideals embodied in our literature, and through every-day contact in the school, emphasize the futility of strength divorced from righteousness.

(4) Shall let the thrilling events of the present not only color, but also constitute the core of the subject matter of instruction in the elementary and the high schools.

(5) Shall promote the physical well-being of pupils.

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(6) Shall use methods of discipline which will foster initiative and spontaneity coupled with courtesy, self-restraint, and prompt obedience.

(7) Shall make the utmost possible effort so to interest pupils in their own schooling that dropping out and juvenile delinquency will be reduced to a minimum.

Let me indicate briefly some of the problems which are of pressing importance, leaving to your own discretion their further elaboration.

If we are to maintain our school organization at its high level of efficiency, we need an adequate supply of teachers. Therefore, I urge all teachers to remain in the service and to do their best to induce competent people to become candidates for admission to the service. Our present staff has been depleted to such an extent that it has been found necessary to request the government to designate

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our work as an essential industry and to grant deferred classification to such members of our administrative, supervising, and teaching staff as are necessary to insure the proper maintenance of the schools. In connection with teachers' applications for leave, either with or without pay, it will probably be necessary to insist that not only the immediate superior give approval, but that the commanding officer in the branch of service for entrance into which the candidate is making application shall certify not only that the services to be rendered are essential, but also that the applicant is peculiarly well qualified to render such service.

It is my settled conviction that the teaching service must be made more attractive in terms of increased compensation and more helpful and more sympathetic supervision. You can help by devising an organized channel of expres-

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sion, whether it be the present Teachers' Council or a modified form of such organization, which will permit the teachers to voice suggestions, opinions, and requests with reference to the conduct of school work.

Another problem of immediate importance is the matter of adequately housing our 800,000 pupils. As you are aware, the Federal authorities, after giving due consideration to our requests for building materials, have denied the request in toto. We must acquiesce in this decision. As our present school accommodations are inadequate, the ingenuity of all will be taxed to devise means of providing pupils with a full day's schooling. I entreat your consideration and your cooperation in this matter. No plan of general application will be laid down, but the well recognized evils of certain types of double session or duplicate school programs

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should be avoided. Constructive suggestions, such as the modification of the school year program, the extension of the school day, the school week, and the school year, the expansion of the opportunity classes in our summer schools, the development of more flexible grading schemes in our higher grades, the possibility of promotion by subjects, the extension of the intermediate type of school, may enable us to make the best of a regrettable situation.

Americanization, both as a term and as a process, is very familiar to you, and therefore, in view of its present importance, let me simply warn you against the assumption that the bulk of Americanization work must be done through such agencies as evening schools, continuation classes, lecture centers, parents' associations, or community centers. Effective as these agencies are, it is the beneficent

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multiple influence of the day school teacher, exerted throughout the day to furnish ideas and habits to our pupils, that insures the transformation of the alien home and foreign neighborhood. Do all you can to promote the success of this Americanization work among adults, but do not forget that the children in your schools are the treasure bearers to the foreign home of that language equipment, that generous enthusiasm for institutional life, and these habits of orderly living which constitute the essence of American ideals.

Were my message to you one of detail, I would emphasize the necessity of economy of all kinds, whether it be in the use of supplies, the maintenance of equipment, or the honest execution of the daily program. I would expand upon the necessity of close attention to matters of methodology, such as the need of

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self checking in arithmetic, the desirability of insuring to every child a fairly rapid, legible style of penmanship and a mastery of the minimum spelling vocabulary proved to be the basis of ordinary business and social correspondence, the distinction to be observed in the reading process between oral rendition and thought getting, the development of clear-cut speech through ample exercise in the class room, and the necessity of treating history and geography as closely related subjects significant in our present day life. But I shall refrain from treating these matters, because I am confident that in the near future it will be possible, through the cooperation of the superintendents, principals, and other supervisors to assure to the teachers a more helpful supervision than has been possible hitherto, and that, therefore, such matters will receive the attention their

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importance demands.

Let me conclude by again referring to the war in which we are all engaged, whether we stand in the presence of a class in the heart of the ghetto or lie steel-helmeted in the fields of Flanders. To put forth our best efforts as teachers we must identify ourselves with the attempt of our Allies to preserve those rights of manhood, for the establishment of which our own nation was founded, and in the defense of which it is now pouring forth its richest treasure. These rights have been and still are in fearful jeopardy. Were we not a firmly united people, each and every one resolved to give his labor, his wealth, and even his life to guarantee these rights to posterity, the issue would be in doubt, but united as we are in every aspiration and endeavor, the battlefield extends not only to New York City, but to every village throughout the land.

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Last July, while attending the convention of the National Education Association in Pittsburg, I sat gazing out of the hotel window in the dusk of the evening. The clouds were lowering, the atmosphere was smoke-laden, and in the distance a foundry running a heat was sending a shower of dazzling sparks into the darkness of the night. Across the way, on a neighboring building, I caught a glimpse of the "Stars and Stripes." Like a flash, the gloom of the scene vanished, and I followed, as in a vision, that steel to the battle riven western front. Those sable clouds were transformed into the garment of a bereaved but triumphant democracy, and those fiery sparks were a golden crown unto her head. I proceeded to a meeting at which various representatives of our Allies spoke of the war in relation to education, and listened spell-bound to a beautiful story which, to my mind, is

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prophetic of the part we play in this war for democracy. It was related that France has shown her confidence in our army by giving into its keeping her most treasured possession—Alsace and Lorraine; that some of our boys were billeted near the home of Joan of Arc; that they were told the story of how Joan had been inspired by heavenly voices. Incredible, they halted a poilu going by, and inquired if such voices were still heard in the land and would lead to the salvation of France. The Frenchman halted, and then said, “Messieurs, listen.” In the distance they heard faintly but clearly the silver-throated bugle of the American forces sounding the call to battle and to victory.

Cordially yours,

William L. Ettinger.
Superintendent of Schools

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